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ABSTRACT

Using a case study of four schools at which tracking has been eliminated ("detracked" schools), this paper provides empirical data that examines the effect of detracking on academic achievement. In the four study schools in a Virginia city, detracking was not a result of planning and deliberation, but a pragmatic byproduct of each school's size. Faced with declining test scores and a high dropout rate, the school system established four "focus" schools, each centered around a theme, on the site of a former junior high school. Each school began with only a 9th and 10th grade, or in one case, with only a 9th grade, with plans to add a grade per year. Faculty members were interviewed, classroom observations were conducted, and year-end academic and attendance data were analyzed. Data point to a fairly direct correlation between a faculty's explicit acknowledgment and acceptance of a detracked environment and subsequent social and academic enhancement. Detracking in and of itself did not promote enhanced academic achievement. When a school ignored or marginalized issues of inclusion, equity, and high expectations for all, exclusionary practices were found in detracked learning environments. The structure of detracking was found to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for facilitating equity and achievement. (Contains 6 figures and 38 references.) (SLD)

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Exclusionary Practices and Detracked Learning Environments: A Case Study

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Exclusionary Practices and Detracked Learning Environments: A Case Study[1]

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Introduction

The last quarter century has seen a sustained critique on the practice of tracking. Tracking has been implicated in engendering and exacerbating academic inequalities among students, of promoting racial and socio-economic stratification within schools, and of fostering a climate of failure for those students not at the top of the academic pyramid. Detracking is thus promoted as a necessary step towards alleviating cognitive, affective, and social inequities (Oakes, 1985; Wheelock, 1992). Some recent research, though, disputes many of these claims. Arguing that tracking has been unfairly cast in the role of an overarching bogeyman, this research states that the dismantling of tracking may cause more harm than good (Rees, Argys, & Brewer, 1996).

As practitioners and policymakers look to systematic models of change to promote enhanced learning, it becomes increasingly vital to clarify the role detracking. A major component of many of the schoolwide reform models available to educators is the elimination or drastic decrease of tracking (for an overview, see Fashola and Slavin, 1998). As these models become propagated through programs such as the US Department of Education's Comprehensive School Reform Development Project (US Department of Education, 1998) detracking becomes a more accepted part of schooling. However, the question remains as to the efficacy of detracking.

Detracking is critiqued on two distinct levels. One argument centers on research showing that tracking enhances the academic skills of students in high ability groupings without drastic detrimental effects on low ability groupings (Kulik, 1992). The second argument points out that detracking advocates often conflate the structural removal of tracking with the processional realignment of school norms. It is the changed perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding high standards, inclusion, and a climate of caring that promotes enhanced learning, not the dismantling of a particular structure (Hallinan, 1994b).

Using a case study of four detracked schools, this paper provides empirical data that engages the latter argument. By keeping the variable of detracking a constant, this study analyzed the implications of the variance in the processional variable. By thus separating structural and processional components, the study found that detracking in and of itself did not promote enhanced academic achievement. Instead, the creation

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of a community of learners was dependent upon the processional nature of changing faculty beliefs and practices concerning inclusion, equity, and high expectations for all students. When a school ignored or marginalized such issues, exclusionary classroom practices were found in detracked learning environments. This study does not contend that the structure of detracking is irrelevant, instead, this study found that the structure of detracking is a necessary but not sufficient condition for facilitating equity and achievement. Without teacher acknowledgement and appropriation of detracking's goals, heterogeneous ability groupings continue to be pervaded by exclusionary practice.

A framework for interpreting the detracking debates

Detracking advocates point to a plethora of studies demonstrating the inequity of tracking. Studies have found that students in lower tracks develop lower self-esteem, have lower life aspirations, and are provided with inferior instruction (Oakes, 1985; Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends & LePore, 1995). Lower track classrooms have been found to be "caricatures" of higher tracks due to the propensity of teachers and administrators to disparage the potential for higher-order learning to occur in the lower tracks (Page, 1991). Furthermore, tracking has been found to create rigid stratification that runs along racial and socio-economic lines, creating highly segregated student populations (Rosenbaum, 1976; Oakes, 1990; Kahne, 1994). As one vocal critic of tracking has put it, the educational system has been appropriated "only for *my* kid" (Kohn, 1998).

Critics bolster their argument by pointing to studies, particularly Slavin's review of the literature (1987, 1990, 1993), that conclude that tracking has no effect on academic achievement. Slavin acknowledges that comparisons between high track and low track find students in high-ability groups showing gains in achievement while those in low-ability groups showing losses in achievement. "Track/no-track studies, on the other hand, find that the achievement effects of ability grouping are near zero for high, average, and low achievers. Note that both types of studies agree on the net effect of ability grouping – zero – but disagree only on whether there are markedly different effects for high- and low-track students" (Slavin, 1995, p.220).

Furthermore, detracking advocates point to numerous empirical examples of schools that have dramatically increased academic performance through detracking (see, for example, Mehan, 1994; Cooper, 1997). All detracked schools, Smith-Maddock and Wheelock argue, are guided by three principles: seeking

to reduce student isolation, expanding access to valued knowledge, and extending high expectations to all students (1995). Detracking is thus often viewed as a moral imperative based on principles of social justice, supported by statistical research, and affirmed by real-life success stories (see Wheelock, 1992)[2].

The detracking movement has in turn provoked a predicted backlash. "In the education journals, it's taken as gospel that tracking is a bad thing," Tom Loveless is recently quoted by Education Week, "what I'm saying is we just don't know if tracking is good or bad, and we really don't know if detracking is good or bad" (Viadero, 1999). Today's tracking structure, some scholars argue, is drastically more open and fluid than those of even a generation ago (see Lucas, 1999, for a detailed analysis of this point). Citing this, critics of detracking maintain that "inequity and malfeasance" are not inherent within the system of tracking but are more likely the "arbitrary manifestations of bad practice and human error" (Loveless, 1998). If indeed today's tracking is a permeable and flexible structure, then tinkering with the system can and should overcome racial and socio-economic segregation and is thus a much more preferable option than reinventing a new model of schooling (Hallinan, 1994a).

Furthermore, an ongoing debate surrounds Slavin's methodology. Citing his reliance on data prior to 1978, his elimination of studies on gifted education, and contradictory findings of subsequent meta-analysis, some scholars argue that the harmful effects of tracking are far from certain (Kulik, 1992, Gallagher, 1995, Rees, Argys and Brewer, 1996).

Finally, some scholars point out that "[w]hen Oakes and others advocate detracking, they usually imply more than heterogeneous grouping. Proponents describe schools that have an ideal social and political climate ... it is likely that this positive normative climate and support structure, rather than heterogeneous grouping, is responsible for the success of detracked schools" (Hallinan, 1994b, p.90). The structure of detracking is conflated with the practice within that structure, these scholars argue, when measurements of effectiveness are carried out. Studies of tracked Catholic schools, for example, reveal that some low track classrooms can be highly effective sites of learning when "the characteristics of these classes include high expectations, an academic curriculum, oral interaction between teachers and students, great effort on the part of teachers, and the absence of a system of assigning weak or less experienced teachers to the lower track" (Gamoran, 1993). Gamoran's study supports other work that points to a school culture of effort and support as fundamental to academic success in low track Catholic classrooms (Camarena, 1990; Valli, 1990).

This paper proposes a schematic framework to better understand the detracking debates. As figure 1 shows, the arguments and counter-arguments can be grouped through the following categories:

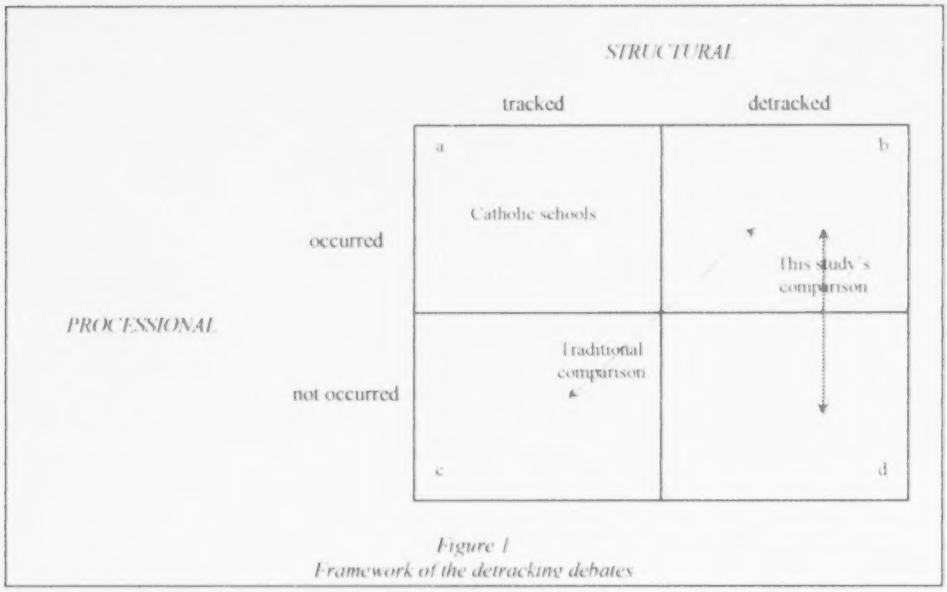

Figure 1
Framework of the detracking debates

Studies of detracked environments point out that detracking involves changing a wide range of factors from institutional practice to school norms and political intransigence (Lynn & Wheelock, 1997). Within this change process, educators, administrators and students are bound to deal – whether explicitly or implicitly – with issues of equity, inclusion and academic achievement. Creating a comparison group (box b with box c) with tracked schools that have not dealt with similar issues creates a problematic contrast. As mentioned above, several studies of lower-tracked Catholic classrooms provides evidence that high academic achievement in lower tracks occurs given processional changes in institutional and normative support (box a).

This study proposes an alternative comparative approach. It looks at four schools in Southern, Virginia, that have detracked learning environments[3]. Detracking was not the result of planning and deliberation but a pragmatic byproduct of each school's size. Thus comparison between schools keeps the detracked variable constant while varying the processional variable (box b with box d). The benefit of this comparison over traditional tracked/non-tracked studies is that it allows for a more vivid perspective of the impact of teacher beliefs and school norms upon classroom practice. It furthermore avoids discussing causal

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claims of effectiveness through what is believed to be a false dichotomy of tracked versus detracked learning environments.

In 1996, faced with declining test scores and a high dropout rate, Southern looked to the small school movement for help. Four "focus" schools were developed, each centered around a specific theme and having a maximum enrolment of 300 students. Although legally and organizationally under the "umbrella" of the main high school, the focus schools have substantive governance and curricular autonomy (see Raywid, 1994 on focus schools).

This study therefore provides a test case of the structural role of detracking upon learning. Detracking was a *fait accompli* for each school and, as will be shown, each school appropriated the structure of detracking and subsequent heterogeneous groupings in different ways. By attempting to correlate the level of processional acknowledgement of a detracked learning environment with classroom practice and student achievement, this study sheds light on the ongoing debates concerning the merits of detracking.

Methodology

This study comes out of a larger, ongoing analysis of the impact of focus schools upon teaching and learning in Southern, Virginia. Southern is an urban city of 50,000 surrounded by tobacco plantations and rural countryside. Southern has a poverty rate double the State average. Its population is 56% black, 43% white, and 1% Hispanic and Asian American. This study, initiated in the summer of 1997, will conclude in the summer of 1999. The data for this paper was collected between the summer of 1997 – the inception period of the focus schools – through the 1997-98 school year.

Situated across a highway divide from the main campus, each focus school occupies a separate building on the site of what was previously a single junior high school. Each school is represented by a "lead teacher" who acts as the point person for administrative tasks, disciplinary issues, and community interaction. Each school began the 1997-98 school year with only a 9th and 10th grade, and is planning to add a grade per year (the Global school began only with a 9th grade class). As figure 2 shows, the schools represent a wide range of themes.

Figure 2
Overview of Southern's focus schools

School	Model/Theme	1997-98 # of students	1997-98 # of faculty
Global	Ted Sizer's *Coalition of Essential Schools*	72	6
Arts	Integration of Arts & Technology throughout the curriculum	93	8
Business	Business/Technical Work-Based Learning	115	9
Excel	Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Program*	131	10

The study employed a mixed-methodological format in undertaking a tripartite analysis. Firstly, the study examined each faculty's conception of the goals of their school and how these goals were to be achieved. Group interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the school year and individual interviews with the lead teacher and two additional faculty members were conducted on a monthly basis. Additionally, the author sat in on faculty meetings, informal discussions, and non-teaching hours at all of the focus schools. Specifically, this aspect of the analysis attempted to understand whether teachers attributed significance to a lack of tracking in achieving their stated goals.

Secondly, classroom observations were conducted – all of the teachers were observed at least twice in the course of the year. An instrument was developed to detail interaction between students and between the teacher and students. The goal of this aspect of the study was to observe a) how classroom practice corresponded to teachers' stated beliefs, and b) what impact, if any, did heterogeneous groupings have on classroom interaction between students and between teacher and students.

Thirdly, the study analyzed year-end academic and attendance data from both the main campus and the focus schools to determine whether a) academic achievement in similar cohort groups correlated with the presence of a non-tracked learning environment, and b) academic achievement in similar cohort groups within the focus schools could be correlated with a faculty's conception of a non-tracked learning environment.

Background information was obtained through interviews with the Superintendent and all the assistant superintendents, with the principal of the high school, and with other faculty and administrative staff at the main campus. Documentation included two surveys of the full student body, and reviews of local

newspaper articles concerning the school reforms in Southern, official focus school promotional materials, faculty memos and correspondences, the Superintendent's promotional materials, and student publications.

The qualitative analysis employed an interpretivist framework to understand how teachers conceived of their non-tracked classrooms and how these conceptions aligned to actual practice in the classroom (Erickson, 1986). The quantitative analysis was conducted on SPSS and relied primarily on linear regression and ANOVA-Tukey HSD analysis of mean differences.

Results

Firstly, this paper presents each focus school, particularly in regards to how each school perceived the role and implications of a detracked learning environment. Secondly, analysis of exclusionary practices will be explicated within each school. Finally, quantitative data regarding academic achievement, student populations, and levels of community will be used to further support this study's contention that there is a distinct difference between a self-conscious process of appropriating a non-tracked learning environment and a simple acceptance of a structural feature of a reform model.

Global -- "Every child has a story"

I am asking the faculty of the Global school how their discipline policy differs, if at all, from the main campus. "We want a school that works," the lead teacher tells me, and several other faculty members explain that they do things on a case-by-case basis. "We cry with them when we have to suspend someone," says another teacher, "and then we hug them and tell them we look forward to seeing them when they return." In interviews throughout the year, teachers consistently and repeatedly returned to the theme that every child was different and special, and the school's policies, curriculum, and interventions had to reflect that basic philosophy. Global students quickly gained a reputation for being a tight-knit and closed community, with no action providing a clearer example than their daily habit of taking their food out of the common cafeteria to eat back in their own classrooms. Global's building was consciously kept open after school hours, and it was common to find students hanging around talking together or surfing the web.

Global's faculty saw a detracked environment as a natural byproduct of their overall philosophy. "At parent meetings," the lead teacher once told me, "it still gives me goosebumps to see a white doctor sitting next to a black laborer, both there because of their child. You know, that just doesn't happen all that

often here in Southern." Global's faculty took seriously the belief that a large part of their school's goal was the interaction of students who might otherwise never have interacted with each other. An ethos of inclusion pervaded the discussions of teachers and daily practice. Global's faculty saw themselves as personally changing, however slowly, the lives of all their students.

Arts -- "The kids didn't understand how we as a family could let them down."

In the first week of February, four black girls from the Arts school came to the assistant principal to complain that nothing as yet had been done for Black History Month. It took most of the next two days, involving several Arts teachers, the students and their parents, and the assistant principal, to sort the situation out. The event sharply displayed two prominent, and sometime contradictory, qualities of the Arts school.

Both the faculty and student body of the Arts school see themselves as an extended family. Faculty meetings are punctuated by laughter, joking and extended discussions concerning specific students. There is a collegial, relaxed atmosphere at the school, with a high amount of teacher-student interaction outside of an academic context. Students consistently cite the teachers when asked why they chose to come to the Arts school. The Arts faculty has instituted weekly "advisor" meetings where a teacher meets with his/her fifteen advisees for fifty minutes. Although initially structured around themes, e.g. motivation and college, these sessions have evolved into "chat times" with a high level of student interaction and participation.

The incident concerning Black History Month was thus explained to me as four girls who couldn't understand how their teachers, who they care about and feel very close to, could not have known how they might feel about celebrating their heritage. "When you're a family," the lead teacher explained to me about the students' anger, "these things hurt that much more." It also pointed out the miscommunication between the white faculty and some of the black students. Several incidents, among them a civil war reenactment, have jangled the nerves of African-American students and community members.

Detracking has not been seen as a primary concern at the Arts school. The cohesion of the faculty and student population, coupled with the more homogeneous academic achievement levels of the student body, has not made heterogeneous groupings an important issue to address. This may also be related to the school's stated goal of creating an alternative pedagogy focused around more artistic pursuits. Given a focus on non-traditional expectations of success, differentiation based on traditional notions of academic success may not apply.

Excel -- "Nobody blinks an eye when I assign Jermaine 25 vocabulary words for the exam instead of 35."

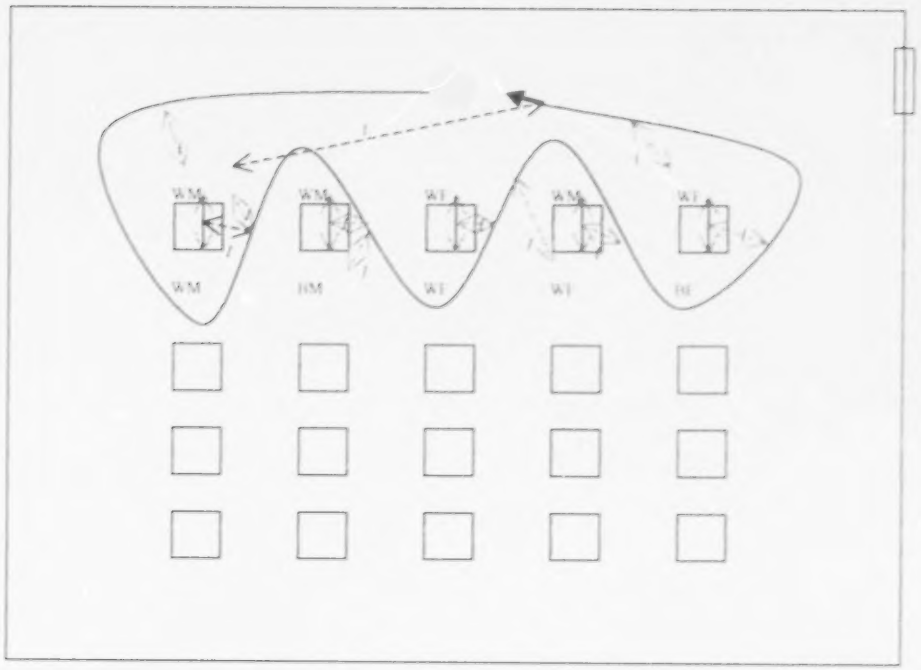
Excel is a school centered around high academic achievement. It has the reputation of being a "prep-school" and a large part of it is deserved due to its student population, which is composed of a comparatively large percentage of high-ability students.

Excel's faculty has made a very conscious decision to create high expectations for all students. To accommodate students at lower levels, the faculty has created a differentiated scale of assignments, such that slower students do between 60%-80% of the work assigned to faster students. Each teacher has developed their own method for dealing with the heterogeneous classes, in that some gradually increase the percentage required while others maintain a fixed percentage throughout each semester.

Excel's faculty has viewed detracking as an enhancement of their program. When asked to create a brochure summarizing the most appealing aspects of their program, the faculty listed the diversity of learners and academic abilities as one of their primary attractions. This is particularly striking in that theory suggests that homogeneous groupings are traditionally viewed as advantageous in high ability classrooms. Nevertheless, Excel's faculty strongly believes that all levels of students could benefit from working together through a rigorous and challenging curriculum. Although this philosophy was somewhat modified to accommodate slower learners, it was not neglected in regards to practice.

Classroom observations confirm this basic pattern of full inclusion. In figure 3, Frank guides a class through translating an ancient Roman speech. Solid lines represent student interaction. Dotted lines represent teacher-student interaction, with the corresponding number representing the number of interactions. In the midst of student discussions, he moves between groups to offer advice, hints, and support. The entire process was marked by student collegiality, minimal off-task behavior, and relaxed teacher-student interaction. Many of Excel's classes had similar characteristics, with minimal exclusion and high on-task behavior.

Figure 3
Excel School – Frank's classroom



Business -- "I don't have the energy to write up my notes for each IEP student."

Of all the newly created focus schools, the Business school has had the most difficult start-up period. Losing their original lead teacher two months before the beginning of the school year, the Business school has struggled to articulate a coherent vision and theme. While many of the teachers had voiced a desire for the school to be more "white collar," the student body that chose to come to the Business school had perceptions that the school was geared towards vocational fields. This incompatibility of student and teacher expectations, coupled with a faculty unable or unwilling to quickly reorganize their curriculum has led to unresolved tensions throughout the school's career.

The Business school has the largest number of low performing and special needs students of all the focus schools. The consequent heterogeneity of students has further exacerbated the faculty's ability to create a suitable and stable curriculum. Many faculty complaints center around the inability to teach to such a wide range of students, with particular emphasis being placed on the low-performing and special needs students. "Some of these students can't even read at a fourth grade level," one teacher complained, "and I'm

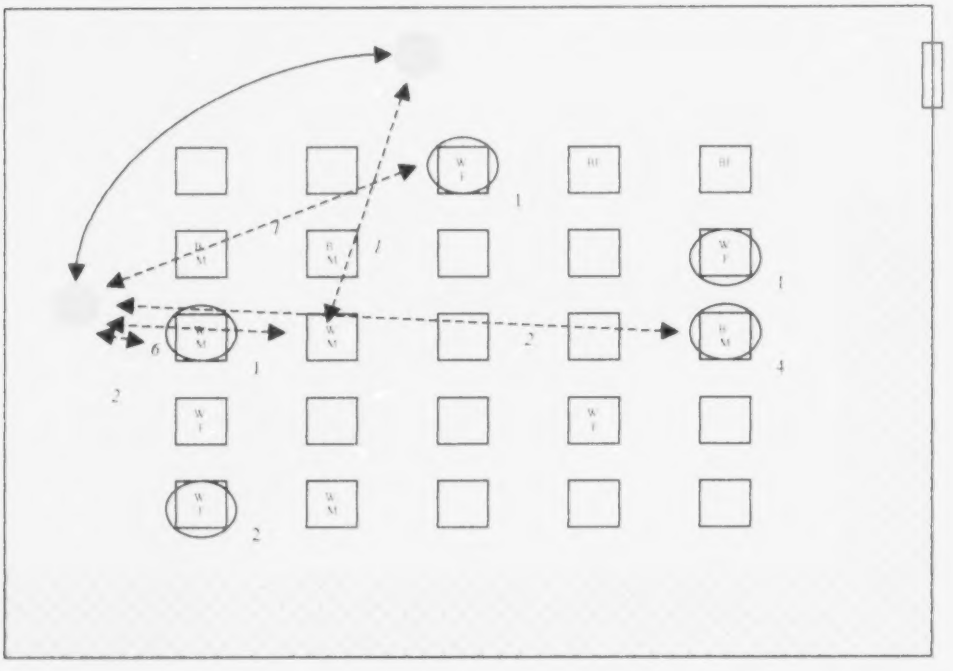
supposed to write up my lecture for them." Faculty have complained about students' lack of motivation as well as lack of study habits.

Mirroring this has been student criticism of the school's lack of stability and lack of focus. One of the most frequent complaints has been that the school "didn't keep its promises," referring to the school's original goal of putting students into job shadowing and mentoring programs throughout Southern. This has not occurred due to administrative disorganization, and more revealingly, the faculty's belief that the students are not prepared to handle such responsibilities. Detracking, when it is thus acknowledged, is viewed as a detriment by the faculty because of the consequently high differential of academic abilities in a classroom. Teachers feel burdened by the additional work, and unsure of how to overcome the disparities in ability that they are faced with daily.

Classroom observations make clear that most Business teachers have created exclusionary practices due to the perceived constraints on their classroom practice. An example is shown in figure 4, where Matt engages in a lecture and question and answer session regarding geologic formations. Dotted lines represent student-teacher interaction, with the corresponding number indicating the number of interactions. Circles around students represent attempted student engagement with teacher, with the corresponding number representing the number of failed attempts.

Moving between the front of the room and the left-hand corner, Matt fields questions and prompts responses based on his lecture. One white male, closest to Matt in the left-hand corner, dominates in asking and answering questions. Several students are uninvolved in the class throughout the lecture. One black male in the right-back corner attempts to ask questions on six separate occasions but is answered only twice. Matt's movements and patterns of response clearly favor one particularly vocal student and ignore and/or avoid a large percentage of the rest of the class. Additionally, there is a seeming correspondence between race and level of inclusion. Similar patterns of exclusion of particular students are observed in this classroom and other Business classrooms over the course of the school year.

Figure 4
Business School – Matt's classroom



Student Population Data

Detracking, it is argued, promotes the dismantling of segregation based on racial and socio-economic differences. As figure 5 shows, the focus schools have varying levels of heterogeneity of students. The Business school has the most similar characteristics to the main campus in regards to racial and "at-risk" characteristics – "at risk" being determined solely on past academic achievement, past attendance, and over-age[4]. Excel had the least diverse group based on these criteria. One important clarification is that the main campus continues to be highly tracked. When compared to students at the main campus who took one or more advanced class, all of the focus schools had similar percentages of "at risk" students.

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Figure 5
1997-98 Student Population Characteristics

		% of school's population "at risk"			
School	**Black Students**	**At-Risk Absences previous year** [a]	**At-Risk English Grade previous year** [b]	**At-Risk Overage** [c]	**N** [d]
Global	40%***	32%	23%	7%*	72 (64)
Arts	48%**	26%*	6%***	8%	93 (91)
Business	57%	46%	21%*	18%	115 (114)
Excel	35%***	28%	10%***	5%***	131 (120)
Main Campus	69%	41%	30%	20%	719 (647)
Main Campus – Advanced Track [e]	56%	17%	14%	11%	275 (251)

NOTES:
Linear regression analysis with dropout as the dependent variable yielded the independent variables past absences, past English grade, and overage as statistically significant.
Statistical differences between each focus school and the main campus based on an ANOVA-Tukey HSD analysis of mean differences:

* statistically significant compared to the main campus at $p < .05$
** statistically significant compared to the main campus at $p < .01$
*** statistically significant compared to the main campus at $p < .001$

(a) At-risk absences based on more than 10 absences in 1996-97 school year
(b) At-risk English grade based on a grade lower than C-
(c) At-risk overage based on more than one year over modal age
(d) N for black students and overage based on 1997-98 school year. N in parenthesis based on 1996-97 school year
(e) No statistically significant differences were found on any variables between each focus school and the advanced track of the main campus based on an ANOVA-Tukey HSD analysis of mean differences.

Academic Achievement

Detracking has been seen as a way to provide equitable access to educational knowledge. Better pedagogy, an academic curriculum, and high expectations are standard fare in high-level tracks; detracking, in theory, should provide access to these benefits for all students.

This study examined results from Virginia's new high stakes statewide tests – the Standards of Learning (SOLs). Implemented in the 1997-98 school year, Virginia's legislature has mandated that a school must have at least a 70% pass rate in each SOL subject to remain accredited as of the 2004-05 school year. The study examined the raw scores of all 9th and 10th graders in Southern taking the Earth Science SOL. The analysis controlled for age-appropriate and overage students. Figure 6 provides an overview of school-by-school results.

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Figure 6
Overview of Earth Science SOL raw scores, 1997-98 school year [a]
State Passing Score 30

School	Mean White students	Mean Black students	N White students	N Black students
Global	34.4** (7.0)	30.1* (7.4)	40	27
Arts	36.1*** (6.8)	29.2 (6.8)	28	29
Business	26.7 (5.8)	25.2 (5.8)	18	31
Excel	37.9*** (6.8)	29.0 (6.6)	35	17
Main Campus	31.9 (7.6)	27.8 (6.0)	55	106

NOTES:
Standard deviations are in parenthesis
Statistical differences between each focus school and the Business school based on an ANOVA-Tukey HSD analysis of mean differences
* statistically significant compared to the Business school at $p < .05$
** statistically significant compared to the Business school at $p < .01$
*** statistically significant compared to the Business school at $p < .001$
(a) Subset of age-appropriate students only (less than one year over modal age)

Given the 1st year nature of the tests, coupled with inadequate preparation time for schools to link the curriculum to the SOLs, caution should be used in interpretation. Nevertheless, some general trends appear clear. There were no statistically significant differences in test scores between the focus schools and the main campus. This is in line with most research that finds no significant tracked/not tracked academic achievement. There were, however, statistically significant differences within the focus schools, specifically, there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the Business school and the rest of the focus schools. Furthermore, controlling for attendance, past English scores, and overage, mean differences between the Business school and the other focus schools were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Interesting to note is that the Global school was the only school to have a statistically significant difference of means compared to the Business school for black students. When controlling for attendance, past English scores, and overage, mean differences between the Global school and the Business school was *alpha* = .068 for black students. Although a tentative result, it appears to corroborate the qualitative findings of Global's commitment to inclusive education.

Discussion and Implications

The Global school typifies what detracking advocates see as the potential benefits in dismantling the structure of tracking. A sense of community pervades the school, the heterogeneous student population interacts socially and academically, and standardized test scores are distinctly higher even when numerous

background variables are controlled for. Put simply, detracking works at Global. Yet in the overall picture of Southern, the perspective is not so clear.

The Business school has rampant problems, ranging from institutional disorganization to exclusionary classroom practices. Test scores are considerably lower than the other focus schools or the main campus even when controlling for background variables. Groups of students feel alienated from the teachers and learning. Student differentiation is viewed as an impediment by the majority of the teachers.

Although not as drastic to either extreme, the Arts school and the Excel school have partially dealt with the implications of detracking upon teaching and learning. While Excel has explicitly embraced the notion of inclusivity, its high ability student population and lack of a large percentage of "at risk" students makes it uncertain as to what extent the school acts on this belief. Likewise, the Arts school more homogenous student population has shielded the school from engaging in the issues of heterogeneous ability groupings. A potential gap in the school's "family" ethos is already apparent due to racial differences.

The data thus points to a fairly direct correlation between a faculty's explicit acknowledgement and acceptance of a detracked environment and subsequent social and academic enhancement. Teacher notions of the role of schooling, and on heterogeneous ability groupings, become apparent in classroom practice. This study found a strong relationship between teacher articulations of inclusivity and observed classroom practice. In other words, detracking in Southern did not in and of itself promote inclusive learning environments. Instead, inclusive classroom practice was observed only in teachers who explicitly mentioned the importance of the positive nature of heterogeneous ability groupings. Put differently, exclusionary practices did occur in detracked learning environments. This supports Cohen's and Lotan's contention that without frequent and sustained use of teaching strategies that promote equal-status interaction, the severe consequences of tracking will transfer even into heterogeneous groupings (Cohen and Lotan, 1995).

Social interaction among students tended to mirror a similar pattern. The environment of the Global school was highly inclusive. Social interaction among students consistently crossed gender and racial lines. The author could not distinguish between "at risk" and non "at risk" students based solely on classroom and social interaction patterns. The same was true of the Excel school (see endnote #4). At the Arts school and the Business school, though, social groupings based on race were clearly evident. From extended observation it was also possible to distinguish high ability and low ability groupings within the racial groupings. This was especially pronounced within the Business school.

Finally, differences in academic achievement among the focus schools can be tentatively correlated with a school's emphasis on enhanced achievement for all of its students. Once again the extreme differences between the Global school and the Business school make clear the impact of high standards upon student achievement. More subtle, though just as important to note, is the differentiation of results of African-American students at the Global school in relation to the other schools. Albeit tentative, Global's commitment to inclusion is reflected in statistically significant tests score differences.

All of the focus schools had similar autonomy, governance structures, and number of students. Almost all of the teachers had come from within the district, particularly from the comprehensive high school. All of the schools had support from the central office and access to professional development. And all of the schools had a detracked learning environment. Nevertheless, this study found that there were distinct differences in social and academic achievement between focus schools. And this differentiation could be both directly and indirectly correlated to the processional aspect of faculty articulation of the role and importance of a detracked learning environment upon teaching and learning. The more explicitly a school engaged in discussions and debates concerning detracking and its implied norms, the more inclusive the school environment was found to be.

Of course this does not deny the differences among schools, not least of which were student characteristics and institutional histories. Many of the problems of the Business school, for example, could be traced to the ambiguity of its original vision and subsequent equivocation among the faculty as to how to proceed given this ambiguity. Nor does this study deny the potential for high levels of faculty discussion *and* unresolved conflict concerning detracking. Discussion *and* an ensuing consensus, on something as important and complex as the goals of schooling, are two distinct processes and should not be conflated. Yet this study's results go beyond organizational determinants. Detracking worked in Southern when a faculty explicitly articulated and embraced the underlying concepts of detracking. When that processional move had not occurred, or had only partially occurred, social and academic results were not as clear. Similar results have been found by recent research of restructured schools (see for example, Peterson, McCarthy, and Elmore, 1996). This is not to say, as Peterson et al have pointed out, that "structures don't matter" but that the change process cannot be founded in and reliant on school structures. Instead, school structures must be seen as arising out of teachers' beliefs and goals.

Conclusion

Educational reformers have advocated for detracking as a means for promoting equity in the educational system. Detracked schools, the argument goes, provide a means for traditionally low-achieving students to enhance their academic achievement through fuller inclusion in the classroom. Furthermore, detracking is seen to raze segregatory practices usually associated with tracking. This study makes clear that the process of detracking is composed of two discrete elements, namely a structural component and a processional component. The structural component of heterogeneous ability groupings, the study found, does not in and of itself promote enhanced social and academic achievement. On the other hand, this study found that the processional component of the development of a school culture of a belief in inclusion, equity, and academic achievement for all was key to success.

As schoolwide reform programs become more widely disseminated and implemented it becomes crucial for educators, administrators and policy makers to understand exactly how these "schoolwide" programs may increase academic performance and promote community. Research into detracking has traditionally conflated structural and processional components. This study bears upon future research on detracking by recommending for greater distinctions in the detracking process, particularly teacher involvement in and articulation of the goals of detracking. Furthermore, it provides a cautionary note to advocates of schoolwide reform in that the structural components of the reform cannot substitute for the process of change in teacher beliefs and practices.

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[2] Recent research has begun to explore the pervasive structural, normative, and political barriers to detracking (Wells and Oakes, 1996; Wells and Serna, 1996; Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow, 1997). Although outside of the purview of this paper, this resistance works to further corroborate critics' demand for dismantling these structures of privilege.

[3] All names are pseudonyms and some details have been slightly changed to provide for anonymity.

[4] At-risk labels were determined solely on academically related factors. Risk based on group characteristics was avoided. I have not relied on such "risk by association" categorization exactly because the goal of the focus schools was to overcome the labeling stigma associated with traditionally poor performing students.

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